DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 848 IR 009 377

AUTHOR Johnson, Mark
TITLE The Public Access File: A Content Analysis Approach.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 27p.: Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Broadcasters (April 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Analysis; *Disclosure; Feedback; *Letters (Correspondence); *Public Television; *Radio
IDENTIFIERS *Federal Communications Commission

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study done on all public access files, which consist of all the letters written to each of the six television stations and 21 radio stations in the Houston, Texas, market area. A content analysis approach using 19 categories of information was employed. The results are supported by six tables presenting overall results, stations/formats, programs named/content types, comment class/TV stations, comment class controlled by content, and positive/negative. The results indicate that the majority of all letters were positive. Organized letter writing campaigns in evidence were positive in nature, complaints about sex and violence were few, and apparently the greatest concern to viewers is the cancellation, rescheduling, or pre-emption of popular programs. Fifteen references are listed. (CHC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED203848

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

IR.

THE PUBLIC ACCESS FILE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS APPROACH

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mark Johnson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Mark Johnson, Ph.D.
Chairman, Department of
Mass Communication,
Texas Wesleyan College

IR009377

The Federal Communications Commission created by regulation a storehouse of audience feedback to commercial and noncommercial broadcast facilities: the public access file. Licensees are required to solicit on at least a bi-weekly basis,[1] public comment, which unless otherwise requested will be made available for public inspection during the station's normal business hours. There is no requirement to do anything with this material other than maintain it, although it is a fairly common practice for broadcasters to respond to letters. Research does indicate however, that many stations maintain a type of form letter which can be personalized as a method of handling their mail volume.[2]

Broadcasters generally try to ignore the file and keep its existance and the important right of access to it from becoming too widely known. While it is true that stations must state that the file is "available for public inspection", research indicates that formally worded advisories are frequently ignored or misunderstood.[3] "Available for public imspection" is neither a clear nor enthusiastic invitation and there is understandably no encouragement to make it so.[4] The public access file has not become anything like a "letters to the editor" page for broadcast media.

To some extent, despite the impediments, considerable literature is available concerning letter writers or "media contactors"; but our knowledge is chiefly limited to their demographics,[5] determinations of their unrepresentativeness[6]

and characterizations of letter writers as 'crackpots', 'cranks', 'critics' and complainers'.[7] Such findings do not encourage the notion that there is a value to broadcasters, or the public or regulators, to be aware of the content of the letters which they are required to solicit and maintain. In general the existing body of literature can be characterized as material[8] defensive in nature, to be used by those seeking reasons to ignore or refute the contents of public access files.

However, even in regards to demographic considerations and value judgment characterizations , the research is contradictory. McGuire and Leroy developed a combined direct mail and telephone methodology which can be employed in surveying and contacting media contactors, but they do not offer reasons as to why you would want this capability.[8] In another study they concluded that media contactors are usually unrepresentative of the general audience. Other research findings are similar: media contactors are generally older,[9] are generally younger,[10] have a high level of education,[11] have a low level of education,[12] have a sense of duty/want to right wrong,[13] or are lonely, isolated and/or alienated cranks.[14][15]

With the exception of one study concerned with a single month's mail to NBC anchorman John Chancellor,[16] the research done on media contactors shares the common attribute of essentially ignoring the content of the letters. This is a serious shortcoming. Even if we accept as an established fact that media contactors are unrepresentative of the general audience

and given the conflicting nature of the research any conclusions are tenuous, there are compelling reasons for broadcast researchers to make a serious analysis of the public access files.

Among these reasons are: 1. They exist. Delivered to the broadcasters door are literally hundreds of comments and reactions to the licensees programming and practices. 2. The media contactor may be an informal, if not formal opinion leader. (Recognized community leaders would no doubt have other avenues of access to station personnel). 3. The file is open to public inspection, should not the broadcaster know what he is inviting the public to inspect? A close inspection of a file is most likely to be done by a potential challenger or competitor than anyone else. 4. If we accept the concept that some media contactors are motivated by a sense of duty to 'right a wrong', it is shortsighted to conclude that the comments in the letter are not being stated elsewhere. 5. A measure of the intensity, if not extent of feeling, can be obtained. 6. Mailmaps of coverage and impact areas can be developed. (This would probably be of greater to radio than television broadcasters). 7. Predicated on the unrepresentativeness of the media contactor, must a comment, suggestion or criticism be a 'mass opinion' to be of interest and value? 8. The assumption, in face of the lack of content research, that media contactors are complainers is a dangerous generality, likely to encourage potential challengers and critics

to be the first to become knowledgeable about the public files, automatically placing the broadcaster in a possibly undeserved and certainly undesireable, defensive position. 9. The opportunity for deregulation is currently quite real. Every source of public comment should be examined for its potential impact, pro or con, on this vital issue.

All of these stated reasons for a content approach to public access files are directly or indirectly related to the fact that they exist and we exist in an overall state of ignorance concerning them. There exists in every station a potential wealth of information. For the reasons stated above, the study of media contactors must move from simplistic analysis of demographics and value judgments as to the motivation and psychological make-up of the letter writer, to a more systematized approach, codifying and analyzing the data base.

PROJECT AND METHODOLOGY

This study is a content analysis approach to the nature of public access files. The data base consists of all the letters contained in the public access files of Houston area licensees, both commercial and noncommercial. The six television stations in the Houston Market and 21 radio stations were studied. 17 Logistical considerations precluded using all of the radio stations. The radio station group included proportional representation of am and fm, commercial and noncommercial and the various formats. Every letter at each of the selected stations dated from 8/1/77

to 11/1/78 was analyzed , employing a evaluation tool developed for this project.

Nineteen categories of information were gathered: station, date, whether the letter was signed, whether the letter was typed or written, to whom was the letter addressed, where applicable from whom was the reply sent, did the letter writer suggest that the comments would also be sent elsewhere, if yes - where?, what type of program was mentioned (network, local or syndicated), the name of the program, if a commercial was mentioned, was it national or local (spots were treated as national, only those geographically tied to the Houston area were deemed 'local'), a miscellaneous category for letters not dealing with a program or commercial or station practice, whether the overall tone of the letter was positive or negative, did the letter mention a specific person and finally, a brief description of the message.

The reason for many of the categories is self-explanatory, however, for some elaboration is in order. "To whom" the letter was addressed was used as a measure of public awareness of station structure and personnel. "From whom" the reply was sent would aid in determining how stations handled public comment and provided data for a correlation test employing "To whom" and "From whom" information. The "Reference" category allowed for a determination of the frequency of media contactors sending their comments in copy or substance, to another source. The "Where" category is the destination of those who indicated that they were making their opinion heard elsewhere. The "Where" data was coded

for three values only: the FCC, a source inside the station, or a source outside of the station. The "Ind" (individual) category was employed to obtain a measure of to what extent a personality - either real or a characterization - evoked a response. The field workers were trained in the use of the coding form and then tested to establish their ability to accurately and consistently employ it. The completed forms were all coded for data processing by the principal investigator to insure uniformity and consistency. Tabulation, cross tabulation and correlation were used as the tools of analysis.

RESULTS

Overall results are presented in TABLE I. Total N was 3299, of which 70.2% were letters directed to television stations and 29.8% to radio stations. 93.3% of all letters writers signed their comments; 41% of the letters were typed and 59% hand written. The plurality of letters were addressed in a "Dear Sir" or "To Whom it may concern" format and the plurality of responses came from a clerical employee. There was some consistency between who the letter was addressed to and from whom the response was sent. Virtually, all letters received a reply. In only 5% of the letters (N=157) was there an indication that the comments would also or had also been sent elsewhere. 26% of the 'referred' letters were sent to the FCC, 52% to another source inside the station and 22% to a source outside of the station. Only 13.7% of the letters mentioned a specific

TABLE I
OVERALL RESULTS
N = 3299

Television	70.2%
Radio	29.8%

Signed	93.3%
Unsigned	6.7%

Addressed To:		Response From:	
"Dear Sir"	37.8%	Clerical Staff	46.1%
General Manager	10.0%	General Manager	9.5%
News Director	6.8%	News Director	9.1%
Comm. Rel. Dir.	4.0%	Comm. Rel. Dir.	.1%
Prog. Dir./V.P	13.0%	Prog. Dir./V.P.	19.6%
Other	28.4%	Other	5.7%

Contents Referred Elsewhere	yes	5.0%
	no	95.0%

Of Those Referred (n=157)	FCC	26%
	Inside Station	52%
	Outside Station	22%

General Content Categories:

Local Programs	36.0%
Network Programs	30.4%
Syndicated	27.8%
Local Commercial	1.8%
Nat'l Commercial	1.4%
Other	3.6%

individual and this was in all cases, a 'real' person, not a role being played. Finally, TABLE I provides a general indication content, with network programs and syndicated programs being most likely to provoke a response. However, as TABLE III shows, it is difficult to discuss specific programs in any meaningful sense, as with few exceptions, there was no clustering by specific program.

TABLE II provides a breakdown by television station, am, fm or am/fm radio and radio formats. Here it must be noted that certain unusual events occured during the time frame under study and these events had a strong effect on the nature and number of letters received by certain stations. Channel 2, KPRC television, NBC affiliation, Channel 11, KHOU television, CBS affiliation and KRLY-FM, AOR format, felt the effect of these events. Metromedia purchased Channel 26, KRIV television and moved its "Merv Griffin Show" from Channel 2 to Channel 26. This resulted in a considerable number of letters of complaint concerning an event which Channel 2 had no control over. Channel 11, CBS suffered from the network pre-empted the opening day of the 1978 NFL for the coronation of Pope John Paul I. The impact of this event on Channel 11 was magnified by the fact that the pre-empted game was the debut of NFL star Earl Campbell of the Houston Oilers. Additionally, a very popular soap opera "Love of Life" ended its run and viewers made their complaints known to the station. Finally KRLY-FM was conducting an "Amateur Hour". The contest afforded listeners the opportunity to be a disc jockey

TABLE II

STATIONS/FORMATS

TELEVISION	AFF.	n	%of Total	%of TV Total
Ch 2	NBC	811a	24.6	35.0
Ch 8	PBS	200	6.1	8.6
Ch 11	CBS	721b	21.9	31.1
Ch 13	ABC	263	8.0	11.4
Ch 26	METRO	169	5.1	7.2
Ch 39	IND	153	4.6	6.6

RADIO TYPE	#Stations	n	%of Total	%of Radio Total
AM	6	239	7.2	24.3
FM	11	617c	18.7	62.8
AM/FM	3d	126	3.8	12.8

FORMAT	#Stations	n	%of Total	%of Radio Total
C&W	1e	75	2.0	7.6
MINORITY	2	53	1.6	5.3
BEAU. MUS.	2f	20	.6	2.0
TOP 40	5	99	3.0	10.0
NEWS/TALK	3	187	5.6	19.0
DISCO	2	85	2.5	8.6
CLASSICAL	1	19	.5	1.9
AOR	1g	333	10.0	33.9
NONCOMM	2	78	.2	7.9
CHRISTIAN	1	1	-	-
PROG.	1	31	.9	3.2

Notes:
a includes Merv Griffin
b includes NFL pre-emption and Love of Life
c includes KRLY
d am/fm files are indistinguishable
e am/fm station
f includes am/fm combination
g KRLY

for one hour. To qualify for consideration, one had to write to the station and tell why they should be chosen. This accounted for all the letters in the KRLY file and nearly one-third of the radio total. At various points in the presentation of the data, adjustment was made and noted for these events. In all cases they have a tendency to distort the outcome. For the television stations the events were entirely beyond their control, while in the instance of KRLY, the contest had disproportionate influence on the number and distribution of radio comments.

Even when the appropriate adjustments are made in the television data, Channels 2 and 11 still have far higher totals than Channel 13, ABC and the other television stations. When the KRLY adjustment is made, fm has slightly more total letters than the am stations. The format which received the most allowing for KRLY, was "news/talk" the 3 stations using that format are all am. The am/fm dual licensees maintained one single, integrated file, in which it generally could not be noted to which license the comments were directed.

TABLE III provides a breakdown first by broad program content categories and then a list of specific programs which elicited sufficient letters to be treated individually. In general, it is difficult to single out a particular type of content or specific programs which are most likely to have viewers respond to. It is of particular note that, at least on the station level,

TABLE III

PROGRAMS NAMED/CONTENT TYPES*

PROGRAMS:

1.	Amateur Hour	10.0%
2.	Mormon Conference	4.6%
	Football Pre-emption Letters	4.6%
3.	Football Pre-emption Calls	3.0%
	Love of Life	3.0%
	Merv Griffin	3.0%
4.	Eyes of Texas	2.4%
5.	SOAP	1.8%
6.	Treehouse Club	1.4%
7.	James at 16	.6%
8.	Edge of Night	.3%

CONTENT TYPES: (% adjusted for above)

1.	Syndicated Programs	9.1%
2.	Network Programs	6.4%
3.	Local Programs	6.2%
4.	Local News	5.7%
5.	Specials	5.0%
6.	Local Movies	2.7%
7.	Religious Programs	2.1%
8.	Radio Specials	2.0%
9.	Radio Programs	1.7%
10.	Music	1.6%
	Other	1.6%
11.	Disco	1.3%
	Radio News	1.3%
12.	Network News	1.0%
13.	Soft News	.7%
14.	Feminine Hygiene	.1%

*Note: All percentages are based on unadjusted total study size.

certain significant programs such as NBC's "Holocaust" and "James at 16" and ABC's "Soap" and the much discussed feminine hygiene commercials, are not outstanding impeti for media contactors.

TABLE IV provides the distribution of information gathered under the final heading on the coding form, "Comment Classification". 35.5% of all letters were classified as general latters of praise, Category 1, 7% were requests for information, Category 2, 9.8% were complaints about lack of media coverage for specific events, Category 3, 12.5% were complaints about a program being cancelled, Category 4, 8% were complaints about time changes, Category 5, 3.4% were complaints about the manner in which specific news events were handled, Category 6, .2% consisted of requests that specific commercials be removed, Category 7, 1.2% were complaints about broadcast music, Category 8, 11.9% consisted of comments on sex and violence, Category 9, 3.9% were requests to cancel specific programs, Category 10, 5.8% were complaints concerning pre-emptions, Category 11, and 4.9% fell into the miscellaneous classification, Category 12. TABLE IV also provides a breakdown by television station and what percent of each classification is accounted for by television and what percentage by radio.

Aside from general letters of approval, program cancellations, sex and violence, complaints about lack of media coverage and requests for information, in that order, are most likely to be

TABLE IV
COMMENT CLASS - TV STATIONS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
N	1173	231	323	416	122	112	8	37	394	130	191	162
% of TOT	35.5	7	9.8	12.7	8	3.4	.2	1.2	11.9	3.9	58	4.9
% TV	67.7	66.6	8.6	96.8	93.4	79.4	87.5	32.4	80.7	61.6	100	95.6
% R	32.3	33.4	9.1	3.2	6.6	20.6	12.5	67.6	19.3	38.4	0	4.4
Ch 2%	23.7	46.3	.9	49.0	15.5	35.7	12.5	0	302	13.8	6.8	4.4
% of 2	34.4	28.4	.3	25	2.3	4.9	1	0	14.6	2.2	1.6	.9
Ch 8%	10.2	6	4.0	2.6	32	0	0	0	8.6	1.5	0	1.1
% of 8	75	8.7	8.1	6.8	2.5	0	0	0	21.3	1.2	0	1.2
Ch 11%	16.2	2.5	1.2	38.4	7.3	8.9	0	0	6.4	5.3	90.5	.5
% of 11	26.4	.8	.5	18.7	1.2	1.3	0	0	3.6	.9	23.9	.1
Ch 13%	8.4	6.4	.9	2.1	6.5	20.5	25	0	22.3	5.3	0	3.3
% of 13	37.6	5.7	1.1	3.4	3.0	9.8	.7	0	33.4	2.6	0	2.2
Ch 26%	2.4	1.7	.3	5.7	41.8	3.5	25	0	5.3	1.5	.1	15.4
% of 26	17	2.3	.5	142	30.1	2.3	1.1	0	12.4	1.1	.5	14.7
Ch 39%	4.6	3.4	0	3.8	9.8	3.5	0	0	2.5	7.6	2.0	21.6
% of 39	35.2	52	0	10.4	7.8	2.6	0	0	6.5	6.5	1.9	225

nature of a media contactors comments.

TABLE V provides a distribution of "Comment Classification" data, controlled for by certain types of program content: soft news, local news, local programs, network news, network programs, radio news and radio music. In certain instances where the 'n' for the content type was small, actual distribution instead of percentage is listed. In each catagory of program content the plurality, if not the majority of comments were of approval. However under the heading of "network programs', the approval percentage and the percentage requesting cancellation are close, 30% for the former and 24% for the latter. Its worth noting here that the leader in receiving comments classified under the heading of "sex and violence" was the NBC affiliate.

TABLE VI provides a breakdown of the classification of the letters as "positive" (+), or "negative" (-). All the figures are adjusted as noted for the events discussed at the opening of the results section. For television stations, with the exception of Channel 8, PBS, the overall division while positive, was generally close, while radio stations tended to receive mail which was heavily positive.

TABLE VII provides the correlational data. Overall, the correlation coefficients were weak and provided little useable information. A significant, but weak relationship was found between to whom a letter was addressed and from whom the reply came.

TABLE V

COMMENT CLASS CONTROLLED BY CONTENT*

Soft News: (n=23, freq.)**	
praise	11
information?	1
lack of coverage	1
request cancellation	2
bad coverage	1
sex/violence	7

Radio Music: (n=92)**	
praise	40
information?	1
poor music	17
sex/violence	1
request removal	33

Local News:+	
praise	48.4%
information?	8.0%
lack of coverage	2.7%
request cancellation	1.6%
bad coverage	23.4%
sex/violence	16.0%

Radio News: (n=44)**	
praise	21
information?	1
lack of coverage	1
bad coverage	13
sex/violence	7
request cancellation	1

Local Programs:	
praise	47.1%
information	7.3%
carry program	4.9%
cancellation complaint	7.3%
time change complaint	6.8%
request cancellation	2.9%
sex/violence	23.8%

Network Programs:	
praise	30.0%
information?	10.5%
cancellation complaint	21.4%
time change complaint	4.8%
sex/violence	17.1%
request cancellation	2.4%
pre-emption complaint ++	11.0%

Network News: (n=34)*	
praise	21
information	4
lack of coverage	1
bad coverage	2
sex/violence	6

* Percentages are based on total for program content category.
** Actual frequency
+ 73% of total addressed to Channel 2
++ Does not include NFL

TABLE VI

+ / -

Total +	1912/1611 a	58%/63.4%
Total -	1387/ 927	42%/36.5%
TV Positive	1128/-	58.9%
TV Negative	1191/753 a	85%/81.2% b
Radio +	784/483	41%/31.7%
Radio -	196/164	14.1%/17.6% c

Stations		+	-	%ATV+ 1	%TTV 2	%ATV- 3	%TOT- 4
Ch 2	NBC	402	409/99d	3[illegible].6	24.9	41.1	33.4
Ch 8	PBS	160	40	14.1	9.9	5.3	4.3
Ch 11	CBS	249	472/308e	22.0	15.4	16.2	13.1
Ch 13	ABC	140	124	12.4	8.6	16.4	13.4
Ch 26	Metro	92	79	8.1	5.7	10.4	8.5
Ch 39	IND	86	67	7.6	5.3	8.8	7.2

Radio TYPE	#	+	-	%ART 5	%TA+6	AR-7	TOT-8
AM	6	152	85	31.4	9.4	5.1	9.1
FM	11	540/301f	77/32	43.2	12.9	2.8	4.9
AM/FM	3	92	34	19.0	5.7	2.0	3.6

Format	#	+	-	%ART9	%TA+10	%AR-11	%TOT-12
C&W	1g	62	13	12.8	3.8	7.9	1.4
Minority	2	44	9	9.1	2.7	5.4	.9
Beau. Mus.	2h	13	7	2.6	.8	4.2	.7
Top 40	5i	77	22	15.9	4.7	13.4	2.3
News/Talk	3	111	76	22.9	6.8	4.6	8.1
Disco	2	76	9	15.7	4.7	5.4	.9
Classical	1	18	1	3.7	1.1	.6	.1
AOR	1j	301	32	-	-	-	-
Noncomm	2	67	8	13.8	4.1	4.8	.8
Christian	1	0	1	-	-	.6	.1
Prog.	1	17	15	3.5	1.0	9.1	1.6

TABLE VI

NOTES

a totals adjusted for all significant, unusual events.

b percentages based on overall adjusted negative and positve.

c percentages on overall totals/adjusted totals.

d adjustment for Merv Griffin.

e adjustment for NFL pre-emption and Love of Life.

f adjustment for KRLY's Amateur Hour, 301 letters of 'application', 32 letters of complaint over failure to selected writer.

g am/fm station.

h 1 am station and 1 am/fm

i 2 am stations, 2 fm stations, 1 am/fm

j KRLY-FM

1 station's percentage of adjusted, television positive total.

2 station's percentage of total television letters.

3 station's percentage of adjusted, television negative.

4 station's percentage of total negative letters.

5 percentage of adjusted radio total.

6 percentage of total adjusted positive letters.

7 percentage of adjusted radio negative letters.

8 percentage of total negative.

9 format's percentage of adjusted radio total.

10 format's percentage of total adjusted positive letters.

11 format's percentage of adjusted radio negative letters.

12 format's percentage of total negative letters.

Tabulation data indicated a rough consistency in this area which proved to be misleading. For instance, while the percentage of the letters to the general managers was close to the percentage of letters from the general managers did not necessarily reply to the same letters sent to them. Letters indicating a reference to the Federal Communications Commission all received a reply from the general manager and letters written to the gm concerning news were usually directed to the news director. The strongest relationship was found to exist between stating that the comments would be directed elsewhere and indicating a non-governmental source. Other than that, there were significant, but weak tendencies to refer elsewhere complaints about commercials, either local or national.

DISCUSSION

In assessing the data the finding which merits first consideration is the overall results on the positive/negative scale. Contrary to the limited literature available and contrary to conventional wisdom, the majority of letters received, including a majority of those concerning local, non-entertainment programming were positive in nature. The expectation was of course, the opposite. The adjusted negative total was 36.5%, unadjusted 42%. Media contactors in this study are generally satisfied with the service being provided by the local station. The results also support either one or both of the following conclusions: 1. some of the programs considered 'controversial' such as "James at 16" and "Soap" are either not of major concern or 2. media contactors

realize that the network and not the local station is the place to make their voice heard on such programs. The right of an affiliate to deny clearance is not generally known.

The station which received the largest number of complaints was Channel 2, KPRC. They also received the largest number of comments on sex and violence. This is surprising for two reasons: 1. KPRC is noted for its award winning public affairs and news committment and 2. the expectation would be that the ABC affiliate, Channel 13, would lead in the sex and violence catagory as ABC is criticized as being the leader in 'jiggle' and violent programming. In fairness to Channel 2, it must be mentioned that they received the largest number of positive letters, the largest number of letters overall and the greatest number of requests for information.

The plurality of media contactors are not aware of station structure as most letters were addressed to no one in particular. Despite the emphasis which stations place on having a "Community Realtions Director", or someone with a similar title and duties, this specific title grouping was addressed the least frequently and replied to letters even less often.

Generally, one cannot pin down a specific program as having a notable effect on the behavior of media contactors. Only 7 programs, other than for reasons of pre-emption or cancellation received a noteworthy amount of mail: "The Edge of Night", "Treehouse Club", (local), "James at 16", "The Eyes of Texas",

(local, public affairs, Channel 2), KRLY's "Amateur Hour", "Soap" and the "Mormon Convention". Channel 11, annually carries the national convention of the Mormon Church and received numerous letters of praise and thanks. This was the only indication of a letter writing campaign. Programs which stood out when pre-empted or cancelled were: "Love of Life", "Merv Griffin" and "NFL Football". Channel 2 perhaps could have avoided some of the public outcry which occured when "Merv Griffin" moved to Channel 26, had they informed the public what was occuring. Two checks with station personnel indicated that they did not do so.

In programming categories, syndicated programs emerged as being most likely to prompt a letter, followed by local news, network programming and local programming. Commercials in general and the much discussed feminine hygiene commercials in particular, appear as being of little interest to the media contactor, at least on this level. The event most likely to cause negative comment is program cancellation, followed by program pre-emption. The programming practice most upsetting to the media contactor is the depiction of sex and violence. Contactors concerned with sex and violence were likely to comment on radio music as well. The next station practice most likely to cause comment was the failure to cover events on either local news or public affairs programming. Complaints about the handling of news events actually broadcast trailed behind time changes and requests to cancel specific programs

as being of concern to media contactors.

When viewing specific contact groups, it is again in evidence that there is overall satisfaction. While only in the category of network news was there a clear majority of positve letters, when the classes of praise and requests for information are combined, with only one exception, each of the program groupings examined show a clear majority of favorable response: soft news, local news, local programs, radio news and radio programs. Only in the broad category of network programs did the stations receive a majority of mail classed as negative. The overview of this data sub group indicates support for research findings which indicate a general satisfaction with the public service committment of local broadcasters.[18]

This study provides much information which refutes the conventional wisdom approach to media contactors. The latter is based on a body of highly selected and contradictory literature. The research herein reported is of course, preliminary. The need certainly exists to replicate this study in other markets providing a geographical spread and including different size communities. A further proper follow up would be a general random sample population survey, using these results as the basis for forming the questionnaire.

Bearing the two aforementioned needs in mind, we nevertheless have a basis for rethinking our attitudes towards and use of the

public access file. This conclusion is based on the following facts: 1. the majority of letters were positive, 2. there were a negligible number of letters classified as 'crank', 3. letters were almost all signed and a very large percentage were typed, 4. there was evidence of only one letter writing campaign, and that was to thank a station for their committment to public service religious programming, 5. there were many requests for information based on what a viewer had seen, 6. there was a considerable lack of complaints about certain programs and commercial types which are the subject of extensive public debate, (although this could be a function of public awareness of the more effective target), 7. general satisfaction was in evidence for local, non-entertainment programming. 8. Conventional wisdom was upheld in only one respect - the percentage of letters referring to sex and violence, but the distribution included radio and was not skewed towards ABC.

The indication here is that the public access file is not to be feared and is not a pandora's box, on the contrary it could be a valuable regulatory, public relations and programming tool for the local station. However, like any data base, it can be selectively (mis)interpreted. Thus contents need be known to the broadcaster. The preliminary indication is that the file is generally supportive of station practice and consists of letters more carefully thought out and prepared than has been generally thought. This speaks well for both the licensee and the public and begs further attention.

FOOTNOTES

1 29 R.R. 2d 12

2 J.Turow, "Another View of Citizen Feedback", Public Opinion Quarterly, 41, 1977-78, pp. 534-543

3 Alan Wurtzel and Stuart Surlin, "Viewer Attitudes Towards Television Advisory Warnings", Journal of Broadcasting, Winter, 1978, pp. 19-32.

4 "Legal Guide to FCC Rules, Regulations and Policies", National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, D.C. 1977 (updated regularly), Section III, pp. 8-13 and Appendix V-A. Section 2.

5 B. Mcguire and D. Leroy, "Audience Mail; Letters to Broadcasters", Journal of Communication, Summer, 1977, pp. 79-85.

6 G. Cranberg, "Mail Survey Respondents and Non-Respondents", Journalism Quarterly, Autumn, 1975, p. 542.

7 M. McEachern, "The Town Meeting is Not Dead", Today's Health, 48, 1970, p. 33.

8 B. McGuire and D. Leroy, "Comparision of Mail and Telephone Methods of Studying Media Contactors", Journal of Broadcasting, Fall, 1977, pp. 391-400.

9 McGuire and Leroy, "Audience Mail; Letters to Broadcasters",

10 J. Turow, "Talk Show Radio as Interpersonal Communication", Journal of Broadcasting, 18, 1974, pp. 171-179

11 L. Lichty and G. Bailey, "Violence in Television News: A Case Study of Audience Response", Central States Speech Communication Journal, 23, 1972, pp. 225-229

12 IBID

13 B.D. Singer, Feedback and Society, Lexington Press, Lexington, Mass, 1973.

14 J.D. Abel and L.R. Thornton, "Responders and Non-responders to Television Editorials: A Comparision", Journalism Quarterly, 52, 1975, pp. 477-484.

15 H. J. Gans, "Audience Mail: Letters to An Anchorman", Journal of Communication, Summer, 1977, pp. 86-91.

16 Gans

17 Televisions Stations: Channels 2,8,11,13,26 and 39, Radio Stations: KIKK, KPRC, KLVL, KYND, KAUM, KCOH, KENR, KEYH, KFMK, KHCB, KILT, KUHF, KXYZ, KLEF, KNUZ, KQUE, KODA, KPFT, KRBE, KRLY, KTRH, KLOL, KULF, KAUM, KYOK, KMJQ.

18 B.F. Chamberlin, "The Impact of Public Affairs Programming Regulation: A Study of the FCC's Effectiveness", Journal of Broadcasting, Spring, 1979, pp. 197-210.
W.C. Adams, "Local Public Affairs Content of TV News", Journalism Quarterly, Winter 1978, pp. 690-695.